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SUBJECT: UNODC on Afghanistan and Related Drug Issues

REF: UNVIE 615

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Meeting in mid-November, UNODC Executive Director told Ambassador of the shocking level of amphetamine seizures in Saudi Arabia. He expressed surprise at the difference between USG and UNODC estimates of poppy cultivation in Pakistan, predicted a decline in Afghanistan poppy cultivation in 2009, and proposed to conduct more frequent surveys on coca cultivation in Colombia. He cited problems in counternarcotics efforts in Iran, and requested Ambassador's help for him to meet with CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus. Costa and General Petraeus may meet in Europe during December 8-9. End Summary.

Afghanistan

¶2. (SBU) Costa stressed that reduction in poppy cultivation could not be sustained without improved security. Asking missionoffs not to take notes, he shared with Ambassador the information that poppy cultivation and opium production would be down significantly in 2009, based on preliminary planting surveys there. He said he would disclose this information at the November 18 Friends of Afghanistan meeting. (Note: at the November 18 meeting, Costa stated that the level of poppy cultivation across Afghanistan would either hold (in the poppy-free provinces) or decline, with the greatest decline predicted for Helmand and the southern provinces, where such cultivation could fall by 20% in 2009. See Reftel. (End Note.)

Drugs in Saudi Arabia

¶3. (SBU) Costa began his November 12 meeting by informing Ambassador of his pending visit to Saudi Arabia, because he has been shocked by the consumption of amphetamines reflected in the large seizures of the chemical in the country. He showed Ambassador a graph from UNODC's 2008 World Drug Report (page 176) which indicated seizure of 12.3 metric tons of amphetamines, generally marketed as Captagon, in Saudi Arabia in 2006. Costa noted that that amount exceeded the combined total of such seizures in the U.S. (5.8 mt) and China (6.1 mt), and accounted for 28% of total world seizures. Costa said that Saudi Arabia and Iran have the worst addiction problems in the world.

Pakistan Poppy

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador gave Costa a copy of the letter from INL A/S David Johnson responding to Costa's earlier proposal to extend the Afghan opium survey to Pakistan. Costa seemed surprised at the USG data that less than 2000 hectares in Pakistan were under poppy cultivation, or about 1% of the Afghan acreage. Costa said that former Pakistan President Musharraf had indicated 8,000 hectares.

Colombia

¶5. (SBU) Costa told Ambassador that Colombia president Uribe was "disturbed" by UNODC's data on coca cultivation in his country. Costa noted that both USG and UNODC data, though different, point to the same downward trend in coca cultivation in Colombia. To address Colombia's concerns, UNODC would propose to conduct more surveys throughout the year, as it does in Afghanistan. In other words, UNODC would monitor/survey pre-planting intentions, planting and harvest data.

Iran

¶6. (SBU) He also noted that Iran was a problem for the UNODC because it needs and wants help in counternarcotics, but there is only "limited donor appetite" for assistance to Iran. He asserted that Iran, directly or through Pakistan, absorbs/transships 70% of Afghanistan's opium export. Strengthened border controls will not solve the problem as long as corruption and organized smuggling can circumvent these controls. In his view, for others to help Iran, the government must first be willing to acknowledge that it has a problem with both drug addiction and official corruption that encourages the drug trade.

Briefing General Petraeus

¶7. (SBU) Costa asked for Ambassador's help to brief CENTCOM Commander General Petraeus on Afghanistan. He said he would be willing to travel to Florida for a joint event with the General regarding the narcotics situation in Afghanistan.

¶8. (SBU) (Note: We have since learned that General Petraeus agreed to a low-key meeting in Europe, where he plans to travel on December 8 and 9. Costa has prior plans to go to Brussels on those two days for an anti-corruption event with the European Commission. It is possible that the two may meet in Brussels or elsewhere in Europe during those two days. End Note.)

SCHULTE